2: Bailey G-5 (ca. 1854) 1863
AX5 Vedda AX5

The
race is rapidly becoming extinct; large families are all but unknown, and longevity is very rare. I have been at some pains to obtain reliable data to elucidate these points. Out of seventy-two Veddahs in Nilgala, fifty were adults, twenty-two children. In one small sept, or family, there were nine adults and one child; in another, one child and eight adults; and so on. In Bintenne, out of three hundred and eight Veddahs, a hundred and seventy-five were adults, a hundred and thirty-three children. Here the disproportion is not so marked; but in one of the smaller tribes, more isolated than the rest, there were twenty adults and but four children.

The paucity of children, I think, must be ascribed to the degeneracy produced by such close intermarriages, for I have never heard a suspicion of infanticide existing among them.* Out of fifty adults in Nilgala, only one appeared to have numbered seventy years, and but eight to have exceeded fifty. In Bintenne, of a hundred and seventy-five adults, two only seemed to have reached their seventieth, and but fourteen to have exceeded their fiftieth years. Such statistics seem to show the practical results of such connections. The Nilgala Veddahs, who still maintain an almost total isolation from other people, are rapidly disappearing.† The Veddahs of Bintenne, who have abandoned the pernicious custom which I have described, and still intermarry among themselves, are becoming extinct, though more gradually.

The Veddahs have no ceremonies at the birth of a child, nor when the name is given; and though, in Bintenne, they have long buried and mourned their dead, those of Nilgala have only commenced, in this generation, to do either.

Till very recently the dead man was left where he died. The survivors covered the body with leaves, put a heavy stone upon its chest, and sought some other cave, leaving that in which the death occurred to the spirit of the deceased. They still desert the scene of the death, and the bones, constantly found in good preservation in the caves of Nilgala, prove how recently the practice of leaving the body unburied has been abandoned.

Tennent says, truly, that they have "no system of caste among

* It certainly *was* practised among the Kandyans, but never, I think, to any great extent. I have, however, seen two persons who, when infants, were buried alive by their mothers, and rescued.

† Knox speaks, page 63, of Veddahs, "who lived about Hourly, the remotest of the king's dominions," who were "pretty tame," and used "to come and buy and sell among the people," who resented "being pressed to serve the king" in some expedition, and so "removed further into the woods and would be seen no more." "Hourly" is evidently the village of "Oora-oola," on the furthest boundary of the Nilgala district, which, though, as tradition has it, it was once peopled by Veddahs, is now exclusively inhabited by Singhalese.